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William Blake. Artist, Poet, Visionary Imaginarian

Abstract: So many times, in humanity's history, a genius was mistaken for a madman, or, at least, a too eccentric person for the accepted standards of society. Posterity, though, brought the value of a genius to light since usually genii are also visionaries. So was William Blake. Some think of him as a poet; some say he was, in fact, an artist with a hobby for writing, and some understood the power of his creative force in both fields and beyond those. In his "Prefatory Memoir" to an edition of Blake's poems, W.M. Rosetti (1890, XI) called him "a glorious luminary." The purpose of the present study is to analyze how his verse interlaces with his fine artworks, as well as ways in which, through his artworks, he related to already existent cultural masterpieces, offering us a new approach to them. The study also aims to follow the light he cast to reach future generations and reveal how he enlightened future creators. His cultural legacy in poetry, music, art, philosophy, and religion is overwhelming, as is his huge personality.

Keywords: William Blake, poetry, painting, printmaking, cultural legacy.

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William Blake. Artist, poet, imaginaţie vizionară

Rezumat: De multe ori, în istoria umanităţii geniul a fost considerat nebun, sau cel puţin o persoană prea excentrică pentru standardele societăţii. Totuşi, posteritatea a adus la lumină valoarea unui geniu, ţinând cont că geniile sunt adesea şi fiinţe vizionare. Acesta este şi cazul lui William Blake. Unii îl privesc ca poet, alţii spun că era de fapt un artist cu hobby-ul poeziei, iar alţii i-au înţeles forţa creativă în ambele domenii şi dincolo de ele. În "memoriul-prefaţă" la o ediţie a poemelor lui Blake, W.M. Rosetti (1890, XI) îl numeşte pe acesta "un glorios luminar". Studiul de faţă îşi propune să analizeze modul în care versul său se împleteşte cu operele plastice şi cum, prin operele sale de artă, s-a raportat la capodopere culturale existente, pentru a ne oferi o nouă perspectivă asupra lor. Un alt scop al studiului este acela de a urmări cum lumina trimisă de el spre generaţiile de creatori ce i-au succes şi-a pus amprenta asupra lor. Moştenirea sa culturală în poezie, muzică, arte, filosofie şi religie este covârşitoare, ca şi personalitatea sa.

Cuvinte-cheie: William Blake, poezie, pictură, gravură, moştenire culturală.

Introduction

In his distinction between Talent and Genius, Schopenhauer (*Schopenhauer, 2016, p. 2*) noticed that "Talent hits a target no one else can hit; genius hits a target no one else can see." Contemporary society often recognizes excellent talent. A genius, more often than not, is somewhat misunderstood or even ridiculed by its contemporaries, remaining to be fully appreciated by its posterity, since, besides excellence (which s/he shares with the talent), a genius creates an entirely new vision of things. S/He is, therefore, an *imagianarian* [*1*]. People tend to ignore or even reject such new ideas, beyond their apprehension, trying to maintain a certain *status quo* of their realities, of their lives. Maybe this explains what the critic Northrop Frye notices about Blake's poetry, which "[…] is in proportion to its merits the least read body of poetry in the English language." (*Fry & Denham, 2006, pp. 11–12*) Generations later, his verse began inspiring a long-range of fellow poets, writers, philosophers, musicians, filmmakers up to this day.

In what follows, we shall try to unveil where the power and Genius of this multifaceted creator may stem from, focusing on his poems and the works as an artist. The powerful imagery present in both types of creation is another interest, especially the symbols that are instantiated in both words and images in his "illuminated" books. Historical and critical points of view blend in for the above purposes, including those of his biographer, Alexander Gilchrist, Northrop Frye's analytic vision [*2*] and Martin Day's, Albert Baugh's, George Sampson's, Andrew Sanders's, etc. historical approach(es). Opinions of John Ruskin, Michael Kerrigan, and Jonathan Jones about Blake's art have also been considered.

The last point of interest of the study concerns the ways in which Blake's legacy has been speaking to other creators and is still present today, proving that the power of a genius is timeless.

Results

William Blake, the man and the age

Not many things had been known about William Blake (November 28, 1757 – August 12, 1827) before his biographer Alexander Gilchrist published *Life of William Blake* (1863), revealing the greatness of his personality. After this, many writers, philosophers, art critics, etc., became more interested in the complex works he created. Gilchrist advised his readers from the start about the way they should approach Blake's creation, since he "neither wrote nor drew for the many, hardly for work'y-day men at all, rather for children and angels; himself 'a divine child', whose playthings were sun, moon, and stars, the heavens and the earth." (*Gilchrist, 1863, p. 3*)

His contemporaries (and even later generations) have often considered him a mad man. Wordsworth confesses, explaining why Blake was not understood when reading his poems, that "There was no doubt that this poor man was mad, but there is something in the madness of this man which interests me more than the sanity of Lord Byron and Walter Scott." (*Alexander, 2000, p. 219*)

Son of a London "moderately prosperous" hosier living on Broad Street, Soho, with little conventional education, his knowledge, beyond reading and writing, was self-acquired. He soon became a "new kind of boy," spending "half his time in dream and imaginative reverie." (*Gilchrist, 1863, p. 5*) As a child, he reportedly saw a tree full of angels. As a young man, he wandered into the nearby countryside, enjoying the rural beauty, which became "a lifelong reminiscence […] and stored his mind with lifelong pastoral images" (*Gilchrist, 1863, p. 7*), or, when at Westminster

Abbey, he had visions of ancient kings (of whom he later drew spiritual portraits) (*Baugh, 1948, p. 1129*).

For seven years, the young Blake was an apprentice to an engraver, Basire, in Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields. The initial idea to become a painter's apprentice proved too expensive for his father and was not guaranteeing future living. In his master's workshop, he did drawings of Gothic monuments. He became in love with the Gothic, rejecting any "pursuit of fashionable models, modern excellencies, technic and superficial, or of any but the antiquated essentials and symbolic language of imaginative art." (*Gilchrist, 1863, p. 17*).

After some academic art studies, Blake became an independent engraver, making a living out of it. He came to know such artists as Henry Fuseli (artist and man of letters himself), John Flaxman, and Sir Joshua Reynolds (he would later reject the classic style of the latter). There was an abundance of artists' studios and homes in Blake's neighborhood (Broad Street), and he made the most out of it.

Blake's first artwork publicly exhibited, *Death of Earl Goodwin* (a drawing), appeared in the catalog of the now fairly established Royal Academy's Exhibition for 1780, side by side with names like Sir Joshua Reynolds, Mary Moser, R.A. Gainsborough, Angelica Kauffman, R.A. Cosway, Loutherbourg, Paul Sandby, Zoffany, Copley, and Fuseli (*Gilchrist, 1863, p. 34*).

Most of his time and energy, during his twenties, went into perfecting his art: he undertook "the indispensable effort to master the difficulties of Design, with pencil or in watercolors. With the still tougher mechanical difficulties of oil—painting he never fairly grappled; but confined himself to watercolors and tempera (on canvas), with in after years a curious modification of the latter,—which he daringly christened 'fresco'." (*Gilchrist, 1863, p. 36*)

He unwillingly took part (was taken by the mob) in one of the riots of that time of anarchy and violent outbursts, when the Newgate prison was attacked and some 300 inmates freed. The consequences were tragic. Some hundreds of the young rioters were hanged when the law was established again. Blake escaped that fate due to a drunken soldier who recognized him.

He lived in London almost all his life. He was happily married to Catherine, "A bright-eyed, dark-haired brunette, with expressive features and a slim, graceful form, [that] can make a young artist and poet overlook such trifles as defective scholarship." (*Gilchrist, 1863, p. 38*) Catherine's loyal nature, open mind, and her capacity to assimilate good teaching, together with the significant influence of her husband, turned her into an educated woman and skillful artist and made her a good company for him.

An illustrator and drawing teacher, Blake managed to write as well, along with his artistic endeavors. After his friend Flaxman introduced him to Mrs. Mathew, a learned and generous lady-patron of the arts, he began frequenting her salon. Blake brought his drawings to be seen and recited (actually sang) his verses (some from *Songs of Innocence*). Witnesses admit that he was also a good singer and composer, without any knowledge in the art of music. His tunes were 'most singularly beautiful'. It appears that some music teachers present then would note down his music, although none such notes have been found. (*Gilchrist, 1863, p. 47*) His visits to Mrs. Mathew's house stopped suddenly when the audience understood that the strongly opinionated Bard did not accept to be taught the conventional ways of society and art. A prodigious creative path was open then in front of him.

He died, according to one of his friends, singings "Halleluiahs and songs of joy and triumph," which his wife described as "truly sublime in music and in verse," performed with "ecstatic energy." (*Sanders, 2000, p. 353*)

Therefore, after dedicating his young age to learning the skills of a good artist as an apprentice and befriending other fellow artists, after experiencing with drawing, painting, and engraving as well as with poetry writing (and singing), Blake came to realize that he did not want to follow the old path. From then on, the long journey of the visionary poet and artist began, and the shape of the Genius kept growing.

Blake's Poetry

"Every poem must necessarily be a perfect unity," according to Blake (*Frye, 1973, p. 77*). A poem, Fry argues, in his turn, must be understood as a whole, our perception of it trying to unite all symbols into an on-the-whole meaning. Literature works in time (like music) and space (like painting). "We listen to the poem as it moves from beginning to end, but as soon as the whole of it is in our minds at once, we 'see' what it means." (*Frye, 1973, p. 77*) We have a vision of that meaning. Fry first mentioned the idea in 1947, when he produced a first complex study on Blake: from shortest lyric to the longest prophecy should be taken as a unit and judged by the same standards (*Frye, 1969, p. 5*). Blake defines poetry as an "allegory addressed to the intellectual powers." (*Frye, 1973, p. 94*) We live in a world governed by external compulsions on action (or law), thinking (or fact), and feeling (or pleasure). Another power ruling the world of Imagination includes morality, beauty, and Truth, without being subordinated to them. That kind of power is free and can create a new vision and recreate man (*Frye, 1973, p. 94*).

Rhetorically, Blake's *Prophetic Books* "tackle conversational rhythm in verse and they do it so that many wonder whether they are poetry or not. He believed that the longer line is more suited for an educated colloquial speech in verse." (*Frye, 1973, p. 270*). Moreover, the layout of the poetry texts is pictorial; the poet-artist engraves the lyrics; images absorb words. The movement is called imagism, and "many imagistic poems could almost be described as a series of captions to invisible pictures." (*Frye, 1973, p. 274*)

Thus, we may easily understand that Blake's conception of poetry writing aligns with the principles of Romanticism while offering a personal interpretation of those principles. The particular characteristic of his poetic works is that they must be looked upon in direct connection to his graphic works and the illustrations he adds so many times to his poems. Blake's creations must be seen as a unity of verse and image.

The Illuminated Books

A difficult poet, he became "the most discussed English poet in the 20th century" except for Shakespeare, scrutinized under many approaches, sometimes oversimplified (*Day, 1963, p. 285*). However, his verse must be considered a unity in conjunction with his illustrations. A lot is lost otherwise. All his works should be regarded as a unity because only together do they suggest that brilliant vision: "The earlier poems clarify the later works, and the last poems bring depth to the earlier." (*Day, 1963, p. 285*)

His *Songs of Innocence* (1789), for which he wrote the verse, drew the illustrations and printed the books using metal plates, colors, and his engraver skills are "among the most remarkable books ever issued." (*Day, 1963, p. 284*) Then, after *Innocence and Experience showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul* (1793), Blake was considered an engraver with some proclivity for verse by his contemporary literary world. According to his peers, his poetry was quite eccentric, if not downright insane.

The *Introduction* to the illuminated book *Songs of Innocence* is a short essay in verse on poetry. In Blake's vision, poetry stems from the divine command to sing (the first step is the piper's song); its matter is innocent bliss "he [the boy on a cloud] wept with joy to hear," while its form adds melody to the word: "Piper sit thee down and write/In a book that all may read" (*Blake, 1988, p. 7*). Everything is generated by Imagination. The poems of this volume model for the reader-viewer a world of innocence, populated by pastoral shepherds, echoing green, infants, a little black boy, laughter, mothers crooning infants, nurse's song, children going to the church, chimney sweepers, embodiments of Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love, pleasant dreams of a Golden Age, when the lion will lie down with the lamb, compassion. Laughter, happiness, innocence, and the joy of a primordial unity seen through the eyes of a child threads through all the poems.

Some Romantic traits present themselves in the sense of wonder, in the contemplation of nature with fresh eyes, the awe in front of other varieties of existence, the sensibility imbued with Imagination, the perception bathed in a halo of beauty and mystery, the cadence of natural music.

Songs of Experience (1794) opens with the voice of the Bard, "Who Present, Past, & Future sees/Whose ears have heard/The Holy Word/ That walk'd among the ancient trees." (*Blake, 1988, p. 18*) The Bard had gained experience and has now a vision (replacing the one of the children before) of a world in sufferance. Inhumanity and injustice had caused the fall of man inducing grief and prompting rebellion. However, Blake considers this state of things as natural and necessary in the cycle described by the wheel of destiny. Navigating through this world of terrors, and through bitter experiences, man will get a rich, active life in the Creative Imagination. *Earth's Answer* to the gray despair and darkness of the world is a call for a release of humanity from the chains it is repressed by. On the *Holy Thursday* in this volume, children do not joyfully go to St. Paul's, singing (like in the previous book), but suffer from cold and hunger ("Babes reduced to misery/ Fed with cold and usurious hand?"); *The Chimney Sweeper* is not happy with his job and his life, in spite of his joyful appearance. His parents and the church repress his childhood. Some poems counter the ones with the same titles in the previous volume. The nurse (*Nurse's Song*) meditates upon the fate of childhood innocence replaced by adulthood's hypocrisy and inhibitions. *The Tyger* (one of the most popular poems, highly appreciated for its musicality) counters *The Lamb*. Although people tend to favor the lamb, the tiger, with its apparent malevolent fierce power, is part of the unity of God. It is the symbol of unchained energy. Wrath is the fruit of *A Poison Tree,* and the bright fruit on its branch refers the restraints of the Garden of Eden. The sunflower (*Ah! Sun-Flower*), with its roots in the ground and the head following the sun, symbolically mirrors the desire of man to reach freer, higher spheres while still chained to the ground by its limitations. Blake's London is entirely different than the city depicted by his contemporaries, as a prosperous and free one. In just sixteen verses, Blake offers an appalling picture of a city of sorrow and terror, where children work and cry, the soldiers are hapless, the young harlots curse, marriages are plagued; it is a city of slavery. *Countering The Divine Image, the Human Abstraction* speaks about the hypocrisy that leads to tyranny.

However, the two books must not exclusively be seen as opposite since their songs interrelate, not just oppose. The fall suggests a possibility of progress towards a Christ-inspired innocence and the promise of regaining Paradise. In contrast, the "*Songs of Innocence* frequently suggest the challenges and corruption of the innocent state" (*Sanders, 2000, pp. 354–455*).

Thus, we may conclude that the first cycle of his creation mirrors two states of humankind: the first one is the age of innocence, the second, the age of experience. Blake puts them face-to-

face; they display the same symbolic characters and facts, revealing how innocence is perverted by experience. The reader takes part in the journey of the Bard himself. The second cycle lets the reader long for the first. Still, Blake suggests that it is a natural and necessary step to fulfilling the Wheel of Destiny and gaining the Creative Imagination.

The Prophetic Books

Blake's "prophetic books" apply his mythology to what was happening around him. The first one in the cycle, *Tiriel* (1789), is the allegory of a dying world soon to be replaced by a new one. Tiriel (the character) signifies the old religion "Mistaken father of a lawless race my voice is past" (*Blake, 1988, p. 285*). He is usurped and later replaced by his children because of his tyranny. Worth mentioning is that the masses seem to support the old religion as they are reluctant to accept the new.

The Book of Thel (1789) ponders upon the dilemma of whether the opposites can or cannot be reconciled. Thel does not think this is possible, but Bake advocates for the necessity of this reconciliation. He also believes that it is possible. The character, Thel (Gk. *thelos*, meaning 'will', 'desire'), is an unborn soul, a young female virgin, reluctant to come into the world of the living humans and subject herself to the fate of these and to the cycle of life. She decides to remain in the Vales of Har (Paradise), the neoclassic picture of life, orderly, calm, serene, ideal (-ized) and not assume any other mature experience outside of it, for fear of death and a too-short existence: "A land of sorrows and of tears where never smile was seen." [*3*]

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (probably 1790–1793) is the book in which he opposes Swedenborg by refusing to accept his view according to which evil must be eliminated and good must be restored. Here he denies the validity of the moral law. The God of Sinai is jealous and evil, while Satan symbolizes "energy, desire, and will. Action is good; slave-morality is sin" (*Baugh, 1948, p. 1131*). Blake believes that the two moral concepts must be accepted as symbolizing two states: passivity and energy. They complement each other to create a full life. The book consists of a series of texts, prose, and poetry, some written in free verse (maybe the first one in English literature), printed by the artist after a series of etchings; it also offers the reader a long range of proverbs, reminding of the Biblical ones, but written according to Blake's Romantic revolutionary view on life. They are meant to shock the reader out of his commonplace notion of what is good and what is evil: "The voice of Devil" apparently is the poet's voice, favoring Energy over Reason: "Exuberance is Beauty." The poet's visit to Hell (like Dante's or Milton's) convinces him that the place is the source of unrestrained energy, as opposed to the authoritarian Heaven. The creatures of the proverbs embody such concepts as creativity (as a quality of Genius = the Eagle), while the Lions symbolize Revolutionary Imagination and the Viper, Reason. From the necessary conflict between Reason and Imagination, creativity is born. The figure of Christ suggests energy and inspiration opposing the classical tradition of passivity and reason. Blake adopts the epiphanic or oracular point of view by using parody proverbs (*Frye, 1973, p. 298*).

The Book of Ahania (1789, 1795) and *The Book of Los* (1795) present the same story of the universal creation, of the conflict between father (Urizen) and son (Orc/Los), between Reason and Energy (poetry), darkness and light; the story is told from the perspective of each of the two.

The Song of Los (1795), consisting of two parts, *Africa* and *Asia*, conclude the cycle of the four continents, Africa being the symbol of Beulah, of the primitive innocence of man, where

Urizen tyrannically intervenes to establish reason and Asia being the symbol of error. The kings of Asia call for tyranny, but Orc is again rising against Urizen.

The Four Zoas [4] (1797–1804), the crown of the prophetic books, contains some "poetry of coruscating splendor unmatched by other verse of Blake and almost without equal in any English verse." (*Day, 1963, p. 303*) Left unfinished, the book was meant to be a kind of epopee; each Zoa symbolizes a faculty of man as well as a cosmic law: Tharmas is the flesh of man as well as the cosmic law that makes things happen; Luvah is the instinctive emotion as well as natural copulation; Urizen is rationality and wisdom, while Los (Urthona) is the creative Imagination. The four principles need to work together both in man and society, although they naturally oppose each other. The fall of one and the prevalence of others leads to the split of the human being and the cleavage of society (*Frye, 1973, p. 302*). Structured in nine Nights, the poem is also a history of humankind: in Night I, Tharmas falls, bringing about the end of the Golden Age; in Night II, Luvah falls, and the Silver Age ends, then Urizen, ending the Bronze Age. In Night IV (corresponding to the Iron Age, contemporary with the poet's time), Los (we met him in The Book of Urizen) tries to reinstall some order and put an end to the chaos; Orc (in Night V) is chained to the Rock of Decalogue, but his revolutionary spirit remains free; Urizen (like Satan) explores the darkness of his caves to forge his dire Web (of Religion); Night VII has two versions: in the first one, the building of Golgonooza, the City of Art supports the consolidation of Truth. However, the opposed Error (the Shadowy Female) fights back with secrecy, deceit, repression; in the second version, Error takes the shape of the Industrial Revolution, together with its repressing institutions. Night VIII speaks about sacrifice (the crucifixion of Luvah on the Tree of Mystery), the enslavement of humanity (by Urizen's powerful institutions), and a bit of hope brought about by Enion's song that begins to awaken the sleeping giant, Albion. The final Night IX, or "The Last Judgment," sets in motion the necessary apocalyptic revolution: the Tree of Mystery is burned, all the kings and tyrants are thrown, justice facilitates the unity of the Four Zoas, each taking up its role and responsibility in the maintaining of the unity. Now Albion can manifest his whole lively creativity.

Milton (in three copies) appeared in the same year (1808) as the illustrations Blake did for Milton's *Paradise Lost* to respond to the fellow poet. In Blake's book (in two volumes), Milton becomes Blake (the Bard) to correct some of his errors and assert the Truth (about the real motive of the fall of Satan—hypocrisy, rigid moral judgment, and rationalism and the real core of poetry, which is Imagination)

Considered by many scholars Blake's masterpiece, *Jerusalem, the Emanation of the Giant Albion* (dated by the poet 1804, but published 1818, extant in only five copies, of which only one is in color), offers the richest image of his vision. A hundred engraved plates accompany the verse. His symbolism and terminology gather here, with the addition (as a result of personal experience, being wrongly accused of sedition) of the *Sons of Albion* (symbolizing man's cruelty to man) and the *Daughters of Albion* (emanations of the Sons and embodying women's cruelty to man). The general theme of the poem is the Fall of Man, as a necessity for his regeneration to complete. With the help of Inspiration, the cycle will be completed and reach perfect harmony in Eternity. The poet assumes the role of opening "the immortal Eyes of Man inwards into The Worlds of Thought."

Also, among the "prophetic books," *A Song of Liberty*, *America. A Prophecy* and *Europe* are further discussed below.

Thus, *The Prophetic Books* are considered the culmination of Blake's visionary poetry. They need to be approached as a unity to understand the vast theosophy he created and decipher the keys to his philosophical and religious concepts almost always embodied in life-like or myth-like creatures. Many of them move from one book to the other, like in a vast epopee, the epopee of humanity.

Blake's Art

Trained as an engraver, Blake joined the written verse with images fixing them on etched copper plates, then printing them and coloring them by hand, or sometimes printing them in color from the start, using his invented technique. Image and text inter-relate; they do not follow or precede each other. This arrangement leads to speculative interpretation, and the result must be seen in its unity. The image signs may complement the verse or sometimes even contradict; however, image is meant to enrich the meaning of the unity (*Sanders, 2000, pp. 353–354*).

His artworks are gathered in collections scattered all over the world, such as Tate Gallery, V & A Museum, British Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, The Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester, Melbourne, Metropolitan Museum (New York), The Huntington Art Museum (San Marino, California) (*Murray, 1959, p. 28*).

"Rich and delicate, ethereal and muscular the art of William Blake is as fascinating as his philosophies, threading through his poetry and his prophetic works." (*Kerrigan, 2018, book cover*) Just like his poetry, his art may seem obscure to the ordinary eye, but this "obscurity is assumed and necessary, because, Blake says, 'What is grand is necessarily obscure to weak men […] That which can be made explicit to the idiot is not worth my care'." (*Kerrigan, 2018, p. 6*) Blake's art is built on contraries, just like his philosophy and poetry. The images may seem straightforward, but they are deep and mysterious.

The written word was from the beginning a source of inspiration for Blake's art, starting with *The Bible* (*Eve Tempted by the Serpent*, 1799–1800; *The Nativity,* 1799-1800, *Job's Evil Dreams*, 1825), or Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (*Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims*, 1810), Dante's *Divine Comedy*, William Shakespeare (*Oberon, Titania and Puck with Dancing Fairies*, 1786 based on *A Midsummer's Night Dream*; Pity, 1795, based on *Macbeth*; *Queen Katherine's Dream,* 1825, based on *Henry VIII*)), John Milton (*Satan Calling Up His Legion*, *Satan Arousing the Rebel Angels, Paradise Lost,* 1808).

In his illustrations of Dante's *Divine Comedy* (commissioned by his last patron John Linnell, and consisting of 102 drawings, 1824–1827), "glorious culmination of his art," Blake needs to also comment upon the visions of the former, especially concerning Dante's Catholic view upon evil: "Dante saw devils where I see none" (*Google Art & Culture, 2022*); this again comes from Blake's approach to religion and the moral law; according to him good and evil are not clear- cut concepts. Evil/Satan may bring the energy humanity otherwise lacks.

His most significant artworks are 21 large watercolors illustrating *The Book* of *Job* (engraved in 1826), the 102 illustrations to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and his colour-printed drawings including *Elijah in the Chariot of Fire*, the *Hecate*, the *Nebuchadnezzar*. After an early Neoclassical style, he changed everything according to his visionary conception, abandoning logical arrangements in space and using colour, light, and form in a highly subjective way (*Murray, 1959, p. 28*).

While advocating for symbolism in art and regarding the grotesque images, John Ruskin believes that the grotesque should only be left imperfect, only slightly sketched or expressed. He thinks Blake's black etched grotesque illustration of *The Book of Job is* perfect, but the artist fails when adding colour (*Ruskin, 1987, p. 331*).

His *Songs of Innocence and Experience* are richly decorated, but his prophetic books are inspiredly illuminated, more like medieval manuscripts. Later on, he developed his own technique (some call it "relief etching"), a solution he found for combining text and image on the same plate, not very far from *intaglio* but reversing it. Then he would use an acid-resistant varnish to trace the desired design on a copper plate. The text had to be written "in a mirror," surrounded by illuminations. Then he etched the rest of the plate with nitric acid. After cleaning the remains of acid and varnish, the text and images would stand in some relief, then they will be printed by ink and finally colored by hand (*Kerrigan, 2018, p. 21*).

Interestingly enough, Kerrigan notices (*Kerrigan, 2018, p. 24*) that his prophetic books might be more easily approached by the new generation of consumers of fantastic and imaginative realms of virtual reality and books, movies, and computer games situated in these different realities. The new reproductive techniques seem to be extremely helpful in bringing Blake's works much closer to the reader-viewer than the techniques he once used. For his paintings, he used watercolor, but the color was washed over graphite or pen and ink designs; the result is considered at least eccentric by his contemporary fellow artist and critics. The same technique adjusted by modern technologies seems to be quite appealing nowadays to the image consumers.

Kerrigan proposes a possible division of the artworks into four significant groups, according to their main theme(s). The Gothic works are inspired by his experiences with medieval literature and art; they include Biblical scenes, Chaucer-inspired images, and Dante's *Divine Comedy* images (e.g., *The Harlot and the Giant*) (*Figure 1*). This approach allows him to free his Imagination from the classically ordained conventions (*Kerrigan, 2018, p. 29*). A second group includes the prophetic and mythological works. Here he experiences with the myths the way he feels we all should: not as with ideas and concepts, but by living them, by feeling them, by letting our emotions intermediate that experience. His approach also has the prophetic dimension because he teaches humanity some cosmic and divine truths (e.g., *Frontispiece to Jerusalem* [*5*]) (*Figure 2*). The Biblical group comprises works dealing with Biblical themes and imagery, filtered through his Imagination (e.g., *Eve Tempted by the Serpent*, 1799–1800) (*Figure 3*). The fourth group contains the visionary works, the products of his extravagant Imagination: "As a man is, So, he Sees." (*Blake, 1799*) (*Kerrigan, 2018, p. 101*) (e.g., *Newton* [*6*], 1795) (*Figure 4*)

Jonathan Jones, the contemporary art critic, considers William Blake to be "far and away the greatest artist Britain has ever produced." (*Jones, 2019*) In his review of the Tate exhibition of William Blake (September 11, 2019—February 2, 2020), Jones places at the core of the artistic creation of the artist-poet the depictions of the divided human nature, an idea also present in his poetry. Although the exhibition poster may seem to some a bit too modern in characterizing Blake as a "Rebel, Radical, Revolutionary," the critic asserts that these qualities may appropriately be attributed to him. Jones goes even further, adding some qualities like "pacifist," "anti-racist" (for the portrait of an enslaved person), and, yes, "feminist" (for illustrating Mary Wollstonecraft's book about women's rights and for the frontispiece to *The Daughters of Albion*). Speaking about the illustrated books, Jones considers that the images "come as a free gift" with the verse, as a result of an "infernal" technique the artist said he received from the ghost of his brother (copper plate etching). In Jones's opinion, the Tate exhibition comes to prove those critics who consider Blake's art not so great incredibly wrong; for that purpose, the gallery decided to put aside the verses for the exhibition despite many protests. By doing so, the Genius of Blake as an artist also comes forward. The exhibited works introduce the viewer to an apocalyptic world, impregnated with hellish monstrous images. *The Evil Red Dragon* (who may

be, in fact, any one of us) (*Figure 5*) is placed by *The Good and Evil Angels* (*Figure 6*). Eve takes a pear from the Serpent's mouth; all kinds of monstrous beasts (reminding of Goya) surround the viewer. Blake projects, according to Jones, the terrors and turbulences of his time to cosmic dimensions. Paradoxically, when approaching the small-scale engravings and looking closely at those images, they gain colossal status due to their blasting symbolism. The exhibited works oppose tyranny and slavery, freedom, fulfillment, engaged in a battle that reveals our divided nature. Despite the terrific imagery, there is still hope for humanity transcending from Blake's works. Jones's final appreciation of Blake's art as seen in the reviewed exhibition, but not just there, is that "Blake blows away Constable and Turner—and that's with his writing hand tied behind his back." That is to say that Blake's art may be readily appreciated in itself, not necessarily in relation to his poetry.

However, even though one may consider Blake's art separately, his drawings, paintings, engravings are in very close connection either to his poetry or to other literary productions. Meanwhile, they also reflect his vast Imagination, his more or less extravagant philosophical and religious approaches, his social attitudes. Although a researcher of Blake's total work may need to treat the two separately for some structural purposes, they only regain their on-the-whole meaning when joined back together again. The reader-viewer may experience synesthetic pleasure when approaching them as a unity.

Philosophy, Religion, Vision on Society

The influences often recognized by scholars in his works are mainly *The Bible*, Plato, Milton, *The Cabala*, Spencer, Emanuel Swedenborg [*7*], Behmenism, Rosicrucianism, Gnosticism, Druidism. Out of all these, and flooding everything with his unrestrained Imagination, he built his mythology, filled with esoteric symbolism and profound humanism.

Although in his first works, *Poetical Sketches* [*8*], Blake appeals to classical mythology (bringing such figures as Apollo, Mercury, Minerva, or Pan to life again), he rejects any classic influences and Classicism in the later works. His mythology, free of any patterns, is populated with strange characters like Rinthrah, Ololon, Palambron, Bromion, etc. (in his prophetic books). However, the central figure of his creation is Albion, the archetype of all humankind and all mythology.

He believed that all myths have a common origin and were created by kindred minds because, in the beginning, men received those symbols directly from God and were the key to following His guidance. They encapsulated the universal unconscious of mankind. In Jungian terms, Blake's mythology is not about outside forces but inner ones. He explores his own psyche, teaching people how to know themselves better. According to Martin Day (*Day, 1963, p. 287*), in the first period of creation (1789–1793), his inner struggle is fought by Inspiration and Reason. In the second (1793–1797), the conflict continues, involving characters from his mythology, while in the last (1797–1821), the conflict increases, bringing in opposition, not just Inspiration and Reason, but also Emotion and Senses. As a result, a number of twelve battles are fought. Before Jung designed his chart of the human psyche (with the four cardinals: Intuition, Emotion, Sensation, and Thought, all revolving around the Conscious and the Unconscious mind), Blake offered his own chart of the human mind, with quite the same arrangement: the four cardinals were Los (Inspiration), Luvah (Emotion), Urizen (Thought), and Tharmas (Sensation). Blake's Anima is Jerusalem, while The Self is Albion, the sleeping giant. Personal balance is attained when the giant awakens and unites with Jerusalem (at the end of the same poem). There is an

Anima (Emanation, in Blake's terms) for each of the psyche's functions (Blake gives them names), as well as a Shadow (Specter) opposing each cardinal function. In his works, Blake tries to balance his psyche (as well as humankind) by fighting Reason with Inspiration, then reconciling them, while at the end under Inspiration's watch, trying to bring the opposing forces into a kind of harmony (*Day, 1963, pp. 287-290*).

The mythical vision of Blake (mainly in his *Prophetic Books*) creates an original cosmology where concepts (metaphysical, religious) are imbued with life and are given a form, a name, even becoming personages. These personages oppose each other in time and space, and their cosmic interplay dictates the destiny of humanity. The artist, the Seer, and the thinker blend into one person who moves through a maze of forms and ideas. An idea may develop through a series of signs and symbols, quite often hard to interpret. In English Romanticism, the encyclopedic tendency leads to constructing a mythologic epic, where the myths represent psychological or subjective states of mind (*Frye, 1973, p. 60*). This is the case with Faust (also in Blake's prophecies).

In *Jerusalem*, Blake suggests that the spiritual world is the real world and that God dwells in each individual; in one of his first illuminated books, as an *Application* to the principles stated before, which demonstrated that "there is no natural religion," Blake offers a glimpse into how we should perceive divinity: "He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God. He who sees the Ratio only sees himself. Therefore, God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is." (*Blake, 1998, p. 3*) Men were misguided by Sensation and Thought into perceiving a dual universe, divided into good and evil, when, in fact, the Universe is a unity, and what may be perceived as evil is, in fact, power, energy (*Day, 1963, pp. 291–292*).

The state of innocence poems are not just beautiful, delicate, musical verses. Under their apparent simplicity, some moral, ethical, and social truths hide. Then, the songs of experience cast a shadow on that state of good and purity. Good and evil are not the concepts Christians were accustomed to; in fact, Blake's God of Sinai is what we might call evil, while Satan is the one who brings energy. The proverbs of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* themselves astonish an unprepared reader through their unusual "misplacement" of good and evil: "Prisons are built with stones of Law/ Brothels with bricks of Religion/ The pride of the peacock is the glory of God. The lust of the goat is the bounty of God./The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God./ The nakedness of woman is the work of God." (*Blake, 1988, p. 36*)

An admirer of the French and American revolutions (*America*, *Europe*), seen as freeing the natural man from the constraints of the social, religious, political laws. Departing from the religious definitions of good and evil, he believed that, since life is energy, whatever releases man's energy must be good, while whatever refrains it is bad. The human body is and works as a unity; what is natural is holy; there is no use to blame sexuality

His idea on what marriage should look like is a revolutionary one, as well. In his *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), he insists that everyone should be entitled to an ideal union without unnecessary chains and restrictions. These unions often become perverted by jealousy, hypocrisy, and persecutions by the authoritarian society. The actual crime that brings suffering comes from these severe persecutions and restrictions, not natural sex impulses.

The revolutionary outbursts in Europe reflect in *A Song of Liberty* (1793), announcing the imminent overthrow of tyranny. Orc, the rebellious (in this poem, Urizen's son, Fuzon), will soon overthrow Urizen, a bearded old man. Urizen is the architect holding the tools for creating webs of law and conventional society, conventional nationalism dictated by reason. For the

moment, Orc is defeated, and laws (in the form of the Ten Commandments) are imposed upon the people of Israel. The revolutionary ideas are developed in *America* (1793), where the embodiment of the American colonies, Orc, the rebel, makes The Angel of Albion (King George) tremble with fear. Blake calls this volume "a prophecy" and an "illuminated" book. He created 18 etchings (some in color) for its print. It is no longer a historical narrative but a symbolic essence of all revolutions, disregarding any chronological order. Revolution is part of the cycle of society's life; it is a natural human impulse to rise against oppression, and that fight also leads to the renewal of society. In *Europe* (1794, also "illuminated" by 18 colored plates), Orc is now the spirit of the French Revolution, freeing himself from the rule of Asia (the Mosaic code).

His idealizing attitude toward slavery, whose cruelty he did not accept, is present in an illustration *Europe Supported by Africa and America* (1796), one of the many illustrations to a book on this theme by John Stedman. It is believed that Blake's illustrations may have contributed to the abolitionist feeling in England. There, Europe is flanked by two darker-skinned young women, and the whole picture gives the impression of harmonious unity. In his *Songs of Innocence*, the little black boy has a white soul, even though he is black "as if bereav'd of light."

Thus, as the poet-artist himself noted, his whole work, in verse and image, was meticulously founded on his visionary thought and Imagination. These received some palpable forms as words and images engraved on metal plates and then printed with unbound energy and enthusiasm for his fellow humans to learn and enjoy.

Blake's Legacy

Somewhat obscure and nonconformist, the last part of his creation was ignored and even considered the product of a mad man. It was not until Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* (1863) that the interest in this colossal creator resurged. In the middle of the nineteenth century, a new interest in Blake's vision manifested as The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (especially Dante Gabriel Rosetti and Algernon Swinburne) approached his works as an alignment to their "carnal mysticism."

In recognition of the genius artist William Butler Yeats edits a Blake collected works volume in 1893. He became acquainted with Blake's vision quite early and was familiar with the idea of conflict (*Emanation* and *Specter*) and the thesis of the necessity of contraries for the advancement of humanity. Yeats built his vision of the Apocalypse starting from his predecessor.

The similarities between Blake's vision of the human psyche and Freud's and Jung's psycho-analytic philosophies cannot be neglected. However, Jung believes that "Blake [is] a tantalizing study since he compiled a lot of half or undigested knowledge in his fantasies. According to my ideas, they are an artistic production rather than an authentic representation of unconscious processes." (*Library…, 2022*) His *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* has been exerting a particular fascination in a significant number of philosophers, estheticians, theologists, psychologists, etc., up to this day, due to its unexpected vision of the dynamic relationship between the two concepts.

In the 20th century, a genuine scholarly interest in Blake was born. Worth mentioning is the first substantial book on William Blake, by the Canadian critic Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* (1947). This book opened a wide window to understanding the poetry, ideas, and the whole vision of Blake.

The British Surrealist artist Paul Nash created his early works inspired by poems and images Blake produced. He was indebted to Blake also in finding his subjects, not in nature or the real world, but in the realm of Imagination, of the human psyche, capable of producing images as solid as the real ones. Later, Nash was obsessed with Blake's poem *Ah! Sun-Flower*, which led him to create a series of enormous sunflowers, imbued with the melancholy feeling of Blake's poem. The Neo-Romantic British printmaker and painter Graham Sutherland is also indebted to Blake's pastoral images when creating his landscapes.

The Composer Benjamin Britten decided to set Blake to music and created his *Songs & Proverbs of William Blake*: *The Nurse's Song,* 1930, for soprano & contralto & pianoforte; *A Poison Tree*, 1935, for medium voice and piano; *A Cradle Song: sleep*, *beauty bright,* 1938, for soprano, contralto & piano, etc. In 1931, British composer Ralph Vaughan Williams found his inspiration in *The Book of Job* to create the music for a ballet. Sir John Tavener created beautiful liturgic choral, reminding of medieval church chants, based on *Songs of Innocence* (*The Lamb*, 1982, *The Tyger,* 1987*, Eternity's Sunrise*, 1997, inspired by *Auguries of Innocence*, and dedicated to the memory of Princess Diana*, A Cradle Song,* 2010).

The musicality of Blake's verse kept challenging other composers and singers. In 1971 The National Theatre Company staged the musical *Tyger. (A Celebration Of William Blake)* by Adrian Mitchell (lyrics) and Mike Westbrook (music). Then parts of this musical were later used in a 1977 Thames TV drama, *Glad Day*, on the 150th commemoration of Blake's death. Mike Westbrook gave another version of some of the songs in the musical, appearing on 2 C.D.s accompanied by a booklet, *Glad Day (Settings of William Blake)*, 1999, including jazz style musical versions, full of energy, of *Songs of Innocence and Experience: Holy Thursday, A Poison Tree, The Tyger and the Lamb*, as well as passages from the prophecies. (*Milton, Jerusalem*).

Martha Redbone, "vocalist/songwriter/composer/educator, […] known for her unique gumbo of folk, blues, and gospel," (*Redbone, 2001*) was inspired by Blake's poetry, too when singing *The Garden of Love: Songs of William Blake*, 2012 a collection of hollered melodies, lullabies, and folky mountain takes on Blake.

U2, the Irish rock band, released *Songs of Innocence*, 2014 followed by *Songs of Experience*, 2017, an ambient production reflecting the British political climate and "a brush of mortality" (derived from Bono's life experience). The progressive rock group Emerson, Lake & Palmer released a vinyl single including *Jerusalem* (1973), and *Tangerine Dream* released an L.P. titled *Tyger* (1987).

Steve Davis, host of *Neptune Currents*, a program hosted by a community-sponsored radio station, KKUP, from San Jose, California, proposed a whole playlist of Blake-inspired music (*Davis, 2011*).

Patti Smith, the American singer and songwriter, musician, author, and poet, sang *Ask the Angels* (1976), inspired by Blake's *The Angel.* She also wrote a song about her attraction to Blakean poetry (*My Blakean Year*, written at a difficult time when she felt as unappreciated as Blake might have felt during his lifetime). She knew Blake from her childhood, ever since she got a 1927 edition of his *Songs of Innocence*, faithful to 1789 original, and she spent long hours mesmerized by the perfect interlace of word and image. About *The Tyger*, another song she sang, she confesses: "*And then I wound up singing "Tyger, Tyger," because whenever I read it, I hear the music. But William Blake was known for his singing voice, and I'm sure he sang these poems, but we don't have any record of it. But his music is infused in his words, because where else would I have gotten it? So, I hope that answers your question.*" (*Smith, 2015*)

For the 250th Blake anniversary (2007), she edited a selection of his verses which she titles simply *Poems*, intending it as "a bit of Blake, designed as a bedside companion or to accompany a walk in the countryside, to sit beneath a shady tree and discover a portal into his visionary and musical experience." (*Popova, 2018*) Her preface to the volume is poetry in prose, in its turn, a sincere homage to the great Genius.

She read from Blake to his dying friend, Allen Ginsberg, the beatnik poet, from a volume he had thoroughly annotated before. They both shared the Blakean passion. Apparently, Ginsberg had had a vision of the Romantic poet back in 1948, when Blake recited him in his East Harlem apartment. That experience immediately made him think about setting the verses to music. In 1969, he recorded an album based on *Songs of Innocence and Experience,* featuring simple folk melodies, accompanied by jazz musicians, released in 1970 and 2017. He, too, was convinced that Blake intended his verses to be sung. Ginsberg created his poems responding to many of Blake's poems in a more introspective manner. He confesses that what the great predecessor taught him was a new mythology, a new sense of the Universe, a prophetic view on poetry; "they [the poems] are capable of summoning up in me, the sensation of eternity" (*Ginsberg & Morgan, 2008, p. 50*); he also learned from Blake to write his poetry for music and even published it together with the respective scores *(A Western Ballad*, *Father Death Blues*, *Gospel Nobel Truths*) (*Ginsberg, 2006*).

The Blakean influence was a common feature of the counterculture of the 1960s poets and singers. Bob Dylan wrote *Every Grain of Sand* influenced by William Blake's poem "Auguries of Innocence." The end of innocence is also present in other songs and a vision of life after death, of America as a modern Babylon (still needing to wake up like Albion). Jim Morison wants to open *The Doors* to "break on through to the other side" or criticizes youth's submission to the systems which control their perception. The "cleansing [of] the doors of perception" might as well be attained using LSD, which Morison experienced to touch the infinite. This connection to Blake's ideal of internal liberation is noticeable in Morrison's book *The Lords* (1969).

Jim Morison named his group after Aldous Huxley's book *The Doors of Perception*, a philosophical essay first published in 1954, after experiencing with mescaline. Huxley, in his turn, was influenced by Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell's* well-known quote, "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern." His psychedelic experiences with the cleansing range from the "purely aesthetic" to "sacramental vision." His next volume, *Heaven and Hell*, 1956, ponders on some philosophical and psychologic implications of his previous experience. Both titles are a direct reference to Blakes's works and ideas.

Many scholars consider Blake's *Jerusalem* a major influence on James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake.* Joyce was familiar with Blake's poetry. Starting with the shared cultivated ambiguity, or even obscurity, the unconventional approaches to different subjects, their belief in the primacy of art, their plunging of uncharted nonrational territories of the human mind, they also shared the status of the marginalized incomprehensible Genius. Blake deals with *eternity* (seen as atemporality), and Joyce speaks about a cyclical, eternal time where past and future are simultaneous *forriver.* Joyce's HCE is in many ways similar to Albion, the universal human being (fractured into reduced pieces of consciousness, who, after a series of dream-like nine nights, becomes a complete spiritual entity. HCE is also broken; his consciousness is fragmented into independent beings that seek reintegration. In both cases, the original undivided unity needs to wake up after a long period of amnesia. The Four Zoas are the four cardinals of the human mind (creativity,

Imagination, reason, emotion). HCE is also spread, divided, to the four corners of the earth, the four *dimmansions* of space and time. Both authors use language in a perplexing manner to suggest contraries in the same word; they use humor (Joyce prefers puns, while Blake the irony). While in Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* the roles of Satan and God seem ironically reversed, in Joyce, the two contrary entities, Shem and Shaun. Shem, the disinherited other, embodies those scary, unacknowledged bits of HCE and is the gatekeeper of art, spirit, and enlightenment. Shaun represents the repressive consciousness. They need to somehow reintegrate into the Universal Man (*Smile, 2013*).

After WW II, Blake's works made their way into the popular culture, too, in music, film, and graphic novel. His illuminated books may well be considered the first of the kind and the predecessor of the artist book, a form adopted by contemporary artists. The book has become the object of art combining images and text.

Martin Scorsese's 1973 film *Mean Streets* has been associated with Blakean themes and concepts. The film displays an urban inferno (Little Italy, led by the Mob). The main character, Charlie (Harvey Keitel), a devout Catholic, starts asking himself what exactly is the role of the church: "you don't make up for your sins in church. You do it in the streets. You do it at home. The rest is bullshit and you know it". He is a conflicted soul, trying to find some meaning: his dark side prompts him to advance on a criminal career path, but he can also be kind, unselfish, loyal, which are traits coming in contradiction with the career he seeks. Charlie feels like it is his moral obligation to take care of the psychotic and reckless Johnny Boy (Robert De Niro), the character creating tension around him and adding a bit of humor and exuberance. A particular scene of the movie features a character, Tony, entering a cage with a wild feline. The dangerous animal seems to love him, and they seem to get along well. He confesses he wanted the animal for its complex exploring qualities. The scene has been considered a reference to *Tyger* in its ambivalence. The moral ambiguities pervading this film also remind one of Blake.

The Tyger, 2022, directed by Giorgio Fraccon, is a short film inspired by the homonymous poem by Blake. It uses some archival materials of the poem set to music by Allen Ginsberg. IMDb lists 19 short films, videos, even video games, documentaries inspired by Blake. A reference to *America* is made by Roy Batty, a kind of Orc, (Rutger Hauer) in the 1982 *Blade Runner* (directed by Ridley Scott). The 1995 Jim Jarmusch western, *Dead Man*, features Johnny Depp as William Blake; there are a lot of callbacks to the themes and poems of the Romantic poet. Nobody (an American Indian) saves William Blake, convinced that he is the poet, and even recites some Blakean verses. *Manhunter* (1986) and *Red Dragon* (2002) (versions of the novel *Red Dragon*, by Thomas Harris) both allude to Blake's *Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed in Sun*. The main character wears a tattoo image of Blake's Dragon. "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom" (from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*) is clearly displayed in one of the scenes of *Shivers*, 1975, by David Cronenberg. *The Dangerous Lives of Altar Boys* (2002) (directed by Peter Care and based on a novel by Chris Fuhrman) is about the rebelliousness of a group of Catholic school students. One of them, Tim, argues with the schoolmistress, Sister Assumpta over *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. The nun believes that Blake was "a very dangerous thinker." At Tim's funeral, his friend, Francis, reads *The Tyger*.

Interestingly enough, the dedicatory hymn "And did those feet in ancient Times" from his book *Milton,* a pastoral Christ image and also a revolutionary cry prompting humanity to end the materialistic era and replace it with a perfect one, became a hymn [*9*]. Known as *Jerusalem*, it has been sung many times, by different people: by the National Union of Women's Suffrage

Societies, as a national anthem, by the working people at the end of the General Strike in England in 1926, by the crowds flooding the London streets, after the Labour Party's victory of 1945, by the British national rugby team, by many religious congregations, by rock bands, also used in film, television, and theater, as a most popular patriotic song. This incredible popularity is one more proof that Blake's ideas and verses broke through time to speak to future generations of not just writers or any other type of artists, but ordinary people, too, loud and clear.

Thus, the legacy of this colossal creator covers a vast span of time and cultural areas. Somewhat, not surprisingly, many musicians used his verse to set on music, since his poems exhale that musicality; writers, too, found his vision most appealing, both in themes, concepts, and style. Philosophers and psychologists may consider him a predecessor of specific thought schools. Art, in general, has benefitted from his ideas and techniques and still is. His works have known great popularity, and a widespread, once modern printing techniques and new media became usual in our society.

Discussion

Blake assumed the role of the Genius, of the artist-poet, of the Seer and Prophet to facilitate his fellow humans a closer experience of the ineffable, of the divine, of the mysteries of life and eternity. The first four lines of a longer poem included in his *Songs of Innocence*, lines often quoted for Blake's colossal vision, in a nutshell, reveal what he thought his role was in that respect:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour. (*Blake, 1803*)

With the fresh perception only the innocence allows, the Seer can reveal to us the enormity of the world in just one grain of sand, the heavenly joy and happiness in just one wildflower. The Prophet can experience such concepts as the infinity of space and the eternity of time, and the mysterious realities behind them. The Artist-Poet is the facilitator between these ideas, mysteries, ambiguous experiences, and humanity. His visionary constructs (in verse and images) reveal to us something we otherwise may miss, do not understand, or are not able to perceive. In our turn, we need to decipher the meanings behind his symbols, allegories, and metaphors. We might be able to do that if we find the right keys.

Conclusion

In one of the earliest studies on Blake, George Saintsbury downplays Blake's greater part of the *Prophetic Books* as a mere curiosity; he considers his critical opinions (in art and literature) as only sometimes inspired, but mainly one-sided, prejudiced, and even ludicrous. However, Saintsbury cannot help but recognize some "flashes of genius," some of them (in Songs) of "extreme simplicity [and] unearthly music, […] elfin music." (*Saintsbury, 1966, p. 592*)

Especially in his last "prophetic books," Blake announces the inevitable victory of the new forces in the world. Still, he believes humanity will gain primordial unity and live again in a new "golden age." His vision could not be understood and therefore accepted by his contemporaries. Later, in the 20th century, the rich significances of his vision came to light, and the artist-poet received the recognition he always deserved, that of a visionary, way ahead of his time. In Blake's vision, the role of art was essential in helping humanity regain the "Lost Paradise." For this

purpose, art had to become militant and expose the lie, while prompting humanity to emancipate spiritually, so that it regains a clear vision of its destiny and the Universe.

A solitary figure, both in art, and literature, because of his extreme originality and lack of compliance to any rules or conventions, and because he reinvented and re-created them all as his own, Blake is now being revealed as a poet dealing in the most subtle symbolism, an artist of unique vision, and an intuitive philosopher visiting the realm of the Absolute.

It is often maintained that we live in the era of the power of the image over anything else (especially the word). Blake might be a perfect guide for all of us (students of art and letters, or not) to bringing and bridging the two human creations together and reshape a possible lost unity.

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Notes:

[1] Rare noun; person concerned with imaginary things; a fantasist. Early 18th century; earliest use found in Edward Taylor. From imagine + -arian. https://www.lexico.com/definition/imaginarian

[2] When he published his book Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake, in 1947, a cardinal study on the subject, leading to a better understanding of it, Frye noted that Blake's works are to be understood only in the historical and social context of their creation.

[3] Blake, available on My Poetic Side, retrieved Febr. 10, 2022.

[4] The full title: The Four Zoas, The Torments of Love & Jealousy in the Death and Judgement of Albion the Ancient Man; the original title was Vala: the book was not published by Blake, but later, by Yeats, in 1893 and was extensively revised ever since; apparently, there is no definitive text.

[5] Los, shown as a night watchman, prepares to enter the interior of Albion, through a Gothic gate; in his right hand there is a sun-like lantern that might help him reveal some mysteries of the sacred world.

[6] Newton is presented as a Renaissance nude, at the bottom of the sea, that is, far from the world. His well-formed muscles may speak of the man, but his pose, crouched over some geometrical instruments and concentrating on some scientific truths, reveal the rationalist (vision).

[7] A Swedish Christian theologian, scientist, philosopher and mystic, writer of a number of alchemical and astrological works, especially known for his book on the afterlife, Heaven and Hell, 1758.

[8] A collection of poetry and prose, written between 1769 and 1777, published 1783.

[9] The poem is best known as the hymn Jerusalem, sung to music written by C. Hubert H. Parry in 1916.

Appendix

Figure 1. The Harlot and the Giant. 1824-27

Figure 2. Frontispiece to Jerusalem. 1804-20.

Figure 3. Eve Tempted by the Serpent. 1799–1800.

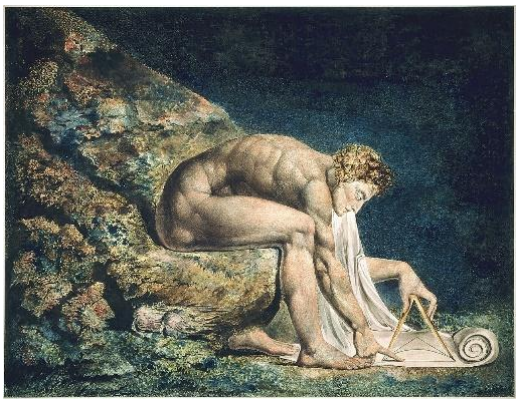

Figure 4. Newton. 1795. Collection Tate Britain.

Figure 5. The Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed with the Sun. 1805–10.

Figure 6. The Good and Evil Angels, cca. 1790.

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